



Mirror by Alexander Lowe

## Chalo Phir Milenge

Original piece and self translation  
By Amal Javed Abdullah

It's the desi within us that has  
trouble letting go.

*Aray, itni raat hogae? Jao beta, Abbu ko bulao, bobot  
dayr hogae, kal subha school bhi jana hai. Nahi, nahi  
Samina, mai rukti, magar waqai mai, inki job bhi to  
hai na kal. Chai? Wesai dil to cha raha hai. Achi tum  
kehti ho to chai peelai tai hain. Beta aap to jaen, Abbu  
ko batain kai thori dayr mai nikal rahen hain, warna  
wob to sari raat yabeen na reh jaen. Han Samina, aur  
batao, aaj kal kia chal raha hai, koi nayi tazji baat?  
Acha waqai? Phir kia hua?*

It's already so late? Go beta, call Abbu and tell him we have to leave. You have school tomorrow after all. No, no, Samina, I would stay, really, I would, but you know how it is, my husband has work tomorrow too. Chai? Well, I wouldn't mind a cup of chai. Okay, if you insist, then let's have a cup of chai together. Beta, you need to still tell Abbu that we're leaving in a little while; there's no knowing him, he might even stay the night if you don't! Samina, what else is new these days, any new juicy story to share? Really? What happened next?

Bag on shoulders, trolley in hand, you turn around and take one last long look. You stand and reminisce. Flashbacks fill your focus; memories and moments, magical and malev-

olent, it all comes back to you. Your train of thought lingers upon the people you love, family who raised and nurtured you in their arms, taught you how to smile and frown, tickled you till you laughed, wiped your tears and snot and cleaned your wounds. You muse over the distantly familiar streets and landmarks and place names; an amusement park you would frequent as a child, the winding road that lead to your grandfather's house before he passed away, the roadside Krazy Kone vendor who sold your most favourite ice cream in the whole world – all hazy in your memory like water damaged photographs, memories and moments decayed in the oceans of water that separate both the ends of the earth that you call home. As you turn to depart, your heart thumps heavily, tugging back like a magnet to the mitti from which it sprouted and grew. This is the restrained tension you always feel. You are ready to leave, but it is bittersweet. Why is there not yet a secret portal between this home and the other, the kind I dreamed of as a child, you wonder.

It's the desi within us that has trouble letting go.

*Jee beta, Abbu kia kebrahai hain? Nabi poochna? Kyun nahi? Aray beta, aap apnai friend kai saath kisi aur din khelna. Kal subha school nahi jaana? Jao, jaldi jaa kar pooch kai ao. Nabi Samina, mai thori dayr aur*

*rehti magar tum kbud time dekho na, tumbarai bachon ko bhi neend arahi hai. Tumhari shadi ki pictures? Kia karun, time to bobot hogaya magar shadi ki pictures ko to mai inkar nahi kar sakti. Jee beta, Abbu nai kiya kaha? Abhi tak cricket ki batein chal rabin hain? Koi baat nahi, itni dayr ham aunty ki shadi ki tasweerein dekh leytai hain. Dekhao na, Samina.*

So beta, what did Abbu say? You didn't ask? Why not? Aray beta, you can play with your friend another day. Don't you want be up for school in the morning? Go now on, go and ask him. Nahi Samina, I'd stay a little longer, but look at the time, even your kids look sleepy. Your wedding pictures? Well, what can I say, it is late, but I can't say no to shadi pictures. Yes beta, what did Abbu say? They're still discussing cricket? Nevermind, let's look at aunty's shadi pictures in the meantime. Bring them out, Samina.

You put the roll to your mouth and take a long drag. Here it is, the outer evidence of your defeated inner will. This isn't the first time you have lost, crossed the finish line last, panting and wheezing, clutching your constricted chest. Time and time again, you have declared that this time will be your last. But each time, when you feel the itch in the wound prickling your whole body, you can only sit on your hands so long until you surrender and scratch the sore raw. The blood and pus ooze out of the infection like molten lava in the burning inferno in which you calmly sit, rings of smoke from your

mouth below melting softly into grey clouds from the flames above. The self-assuring vows made to a past self feel like pretentious promises made to a foreign stranger in another lifetime. Now matter how hard you try to resist, the urge is always too strong, like an appel du vide at the edge of a cliff. But at this moment, you wouldn't even mind the cliff to get away from this constant cycle of self-destruction. You have tried so hard to climb out of the hole, but each time, you slip and slam back down into your misery so much harder. You wonder if this is even worth the struggle; it is so much easier to pretend it isn't. When a bonfire is devouring wood, and the reds and oranges glitter like disco balls and flames dance to the music of the blaze, the wood does not cry, it cackles along to the tune. On some days, you embrace the harm that comes with the high. There is an ironic amusement in watching the world crash around your ears and sitting calmly in the rubble – so much easier than the struggle to resist.

It's the desi within us that has trouble letting go.

*Aray yaar, shukriya ki kia zurvat hai, bari kbushi hui kai aap ayai family ko laykai aur humarai saath kha-nai mai sbamil huai. Han, han, inshaAllah ham bhi apkai han zaroor ayengai, aur iss dafa zada jald milenge. Chhalain mai apko gari tak chor kai ajaun. Iss taraf park ki hai? Aap bethain, dayr horabee hogi apko. Sheesha zara neebai kariyai ga. Wesai, bari shandar hai apki gari – kis saal*

*mai kbareedi thi? Acha? Mehengi ayi thi kia? Bhai, yai jo second-hand gariyan baichtai hain, sab chor botain hain. Mai apko apna aik qissa sunata hoon jo humara saath hua tha jab ham Canada ayai thai 30 saal pehlai...*

Aray yaar, no need to say thank you, it was a pleasure to have you and your family join us for dinner. Yes, yes, inshaAllah we will also come visit, and we'll meet sooner this time. Let me walk you to your car. Have you parked here? Get inside, it's late. Can you roll down the window a little? Wesai, you have a beautiful car – when did you buy it? Really? Was it expensive? Bhai, trust me, all these second-hand sellers are thieves. Let me tell you what I went through when we first came to Canada 30 years ago...

There is a heavy bulk in your chest, and you didn't know you could feel this way. Your heart feels like a gangly claw has pressed its thorny talons into the thin flesh and ripped it in two, gory veins and tissue dangling, crimson blood dripping at your feet. "Losing a loved one is never easy," the funeral director said. "We know how you feel, but it's best to move on. Please insert your credit card here." Move on. But whenever you try to walk, a dark shadow always stalks behind. Sometimes it is just the fuzzy outline of a dark cloud above your head. On these days, you say, "I'm just feeling a little under the weather, nothing to worry about," On other days, it is the sharp silhouette of a black shroud-like ghost enveloping you in its cold, clammy grip. You can't move on if your body and legs are clasped in ropes so invincible that you can't



even see them. They say to live in a constant state of departure while always arriving. Everyone has loved ones who die, they say. You learn to let go. The searing pain has now subsided, it is true. There is only a blunt ache, a dull scar that Time left behind after its clumsy surgery sewing the wound. But there is no forgetting; there are only memories and regrets and tears and wishing hard, wishing so hard, for a second chance.

It's the desi within us that has trouble letting go.

*Bhai, time to dekhain, ab to waqai mai bobot dayr borahi hai. Aap say inshaAllah dubara milenge. Bobot shukriya apkai aanai ka. Allah hafiz, bhai. Allah hafiz, bachon! Kia kaha? Beta, mai uss ko neechai bulata, magar woh to sogaya hoga. Aap Abbu sai kehega kai aap ko dubara layen, phir aap kbelleega, theek hai? Allah hafiz;*

*Theek hai, bhai, Allah hafiz. Bhabi, Allah hafiz, duaon mai yaad rakhiga. Allah hafiz, Allah hafiz;*

Bhai, look at where the time has gone, it's really very late now. We will meet again soon, inshaAllah. Thank you so much for coming. Allah hafiz, bhai. Allah hafiz, kids! What did you say? Beta, I would call him downstairs, but he has probably gone to bed. Tell your Abbu to visit us more often, then you two can play together, okay? Allah hafiz. Okay, bhai, Allah hafiz. Sister, Allah hafiz, remember us in your prayers. Allah hafiz, Allah hafiz.

The car begins to drive away, the children waving back to you through the rear window. You wave your salams at the receding speck until it finally turns the corner and leaves your sight. Chalo, phir milenge.